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U.S. Department of the Interior

Glacier Bay National Park
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Glacier Bay News Release

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Freed Humpback Whale Observed in Glacier Bay

On Tuesday, June 13, National Park Service biologists positively identified the humpback whale which had been entangled in crab pot line, then freed from the line last week in Glacier Bay. The whale, catalogued as #1891 and identified by distinctive markings beneath its tail flukes, was observed feeding normally and exhibiting typical summer whale behavior. The animal was observed and monitored off Pt. Carolus near the entrance to Glacier Bay for much of the day. Park biologists reported that, other than some visible scarring caused when the lines became entangled near its tail, the whale appeared healthy. The whale appeared completely free of any line or other gear.

On Tuesday, June 6, a park pilot boat first observed the entangled yearling humpback whale swimming slowly in lower Glacier Bay. The National Park Service launched an effort with trained staff to assess the whale, then attempt to disentangle the animal using special cutting tools under protocol administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Although the disentanglement efforts were unsuccessful that day, they were able to attach marker buoys to the lines trailing the whale in order to more easily locate the animal during subsequent efforts to free it. All fishing gear, the crab pot and the marker buoys were located detached from the whale floating near Giekie Inlet two days later. Tuesday's sighting was the first confirmed observation of the animal by Park biologists since it was believed freed of gear.

According to recent studies, at least 71% of humpback whales in Northern Southeast Alaska bear scars on their tail stocks from past entanglements with line. Observations of a whale actually entangled are rare; however they do occur in Southeast Alaska waters from time to time. This whale was the first confirmed sighting of an entangled whale in Glacier Bay.



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Humpback whales are Federally listed endangered species. During the summer months, large numbers of these whales come to Glacier Bay and Southeast Alaska waters from their winter breeding grounds in Hawaii to feed on small schooling fish in the nutritionally rich marine waters. Vessel quotas and operating restrictions have been established in the park to protect these vital feeding grounds each summer.

The public is reminded that if they observe an entangled whale, they should not attempt to free the whale themselves, but rather immediately report the observation and location to the local authorities.